

## ***Earth Quest***

### **The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program: Helping Federal Customers Achieve Environmental Goals While Generating Employment for People Who Are Blind or Have Other Severe Disabilities**

By Betty Joan Smith

*"Our instructions are very simple - to respect the Earth and each other, to respect life itself."*<sup>1</sup>

*The late Mathew King*

*Contemporary Lakota elder*

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program is a mandatory source of products and services for the Federal workforce for good reason - JWOD products and services purchases create and maintain jobs and training opportunities for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. *That* is the JWOD Program mission. In addition, another essential element of the Program is to ensure that the JWOD products and services meet Federal mandates...including environmental requirements outlined in Executive Order 13101: Greening the Government Through Waste Prevention, Recycling and Federal Acquisition. Adhering to Executive Order 13101 requirements is like purchasing JWOD products and services - it is the right thing to do.

Executive Order 13101 is designed to make Federal offices, facilities and other places where we report to work each day cleaner, safer, healthier environments. The document instructs Federal Agencies how to accomplish this mission by including environmental factors in purchasing decisions. This executive order, along with other environmental mandates orders has stimulated a demand in the Federal marketplace for certain, specified products and services that are manufactured using recycled materials in an environmentally conscious manner that conserves natural resources. Increasingly, Federal customers are demanding environmentally preferable products, such as cleaning agents that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment.

#### **JWOD: A Federal Environmental Partner**

The JWOD Program is administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (Committee). The Committee oversees the provisions of the JWOD Act, a Federal law that dates back to 1938. The law requires the Government to purchase products and services provided by nonprofit agencies that employ individuals who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. Two central nonprofit agencies, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH (serving people with a range of disabilities) are designated by the Committee to provide technical assistance to community based nonprofit organizations throughout the nation. Examples of nonprofit organizations associated with NIB and NISH include Lighthouses for the Blind and local affiliates of Goodwill Industries and United Cerebral Palsy Association, as well as various organizations that work with individuals who have

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<sup>1</sup> Mathew King, from *Noble Red Man: Lakota Wisdomkeeper Mathew King*, compiled and edited by Harvey Arden, Beyond Words Publishing, Inc., Hillsboro, OR, 1994.

developmental disabilities. Together, the JWOD Program serves more than 33,000 people across America with disabilities.

### **JWOD – Making it “Easy to do the Right Thing”**

So just what is the JWOD Program doing to help the Government achieve environmental goals? The answer is *plenty*! Nonprofit agencies associated with NIB and NISH are actively reviewing their products and checking with raw materials manufacturers and vendors in order to document environmental attributes and claims, such as the percentage of recycled content materials (including the percentage of postconsumer fiber) in paper used to manufacture JWOD paper products. JWOD manufacturers are also examining plastic desktop accessories for compliance with the Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPG) standards. In cases where manufacturers are unwilling or unable to provide such documentation, JWOD participating agencies are looking for viable alternative suppliers.

Another example of the JWOD Program’s commitment to environmental initiatives is in how many JWOD nonprofit agencies have embraced the entrepreneurial spirit in developing and seeking out products that meet Executive Order requirements. Signature Works of Hazelhurst, Mississippi has been working in partnership with private industry and higher education for over a decade in the development of bio-based (using corn starch or other biodegradable, plastic free materials) cutlery. Signature Works also supplies utensils made using recycled plastic. Industries for the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina furnishes pens made out of bio-based materials such as cornstarch and seaweed. Envision, an agency in Wichita, Kansas offers a complete line of 100% recycled (minimum 30% postconsumer material) plastic trash bags, while their printing division can print your brochures, posters, etc on 100% postconsumer recycled fiber paper! Easter Seal Society of Western Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh offers “Daymax” calendars and appointment book refills that are made of postconsumer recycled paper which is also process chlorine free. The Lighthouse for the Blind of Houston, Texas offers a biodegradable, nontoxic all purpose cleaner. The Pinellas Association for Retarded Children of St Petersburg, Florida furnishes mailing tubes made with 80% recycled materials.

Another exciting environmental initiative the JWOD Program initiated is a product review pilot project with third-party environmental certifying organization, Green Seal. Selected products have analyzed and compared to Green Seal’s standards. Look for the “Green Seal of Approval” on JWOD and SKILCRAFT® brand products coming soon!

### **The Quest Continues**

As we journey along this path toward a sustainable “green” future, the JWOD Program will continue to strive to meet the needs of Federal customers. Look for more about the “Greening” of the JWOD Program in future editions of EPP Update. Finally, the JWOD Program is most grateful for the support of the Federal workforce in the past and look forward to being your environmental source by choice as we all work toward meeting environmental goals.

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